

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

10 June 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Dendle (Chair), Roberts (Vice-Chair), Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Huntley, Madeley, Oppler, Gregory (Substitute for Bennett) and Jones (Substitute for Purchase).

Councillors Bower, Brooks, Cooper, Coster, Dixon, Edwards, Goodheart, Gunner, Oliver-Redgate and Pendleton were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

69. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to this first and virtual meeting of the Corporate Support Committee.

The Chair confirmed that this meeting was being held in accordance with the resolution made at the Extraordinary Council Meeting held on 12 May 2021 (Minute 551) which continued Section 5 Part 5 of the Constitution (The Virtual Meeting Procedure Rules) and declared the use of Council powers, under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, and the general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, for making advisory decisions, as appropriate.

70. APOLOGIES

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillors Bennett and Purchase.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

72. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that there were no questions submitted for this meeting.

73. START TIMES

The Committee

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings during 2021-22 be 6.00 pm.

74. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE; MATTERS RESERVED; AND DELEGATION TO OFFICERS

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The Interim Monitoring Officer presented his report briefly explaining the Committee's Terms of Reference which had been defined by Full Council. He drew Members' attention to the appendices attached to the report, in particular Appendix 2, the 'Reserved Matters', which Officers had reserved to the Committee. It was explained that this appendix listed a number of matters which were 'reserved' to the Committee, meaning that if a matter was not reserved, then the appropriate officer could make the decision by default. This was an opportunity for the Committee to highlight any request for change which would then be considered by the Constitution Working Party before being recommended onto Full Council to consider.

Questions were then invited from Members. In discussing the Committee's reserved matters, concern was expressed over Procurement and the value set for awarding contracts which was £100k. There were several Members who felt that this figure was too high and suggestions were made for the figure to be set to a lower level of £50k, especially as this proposed lower level had been discussed and agreed at some of the other Service Committees. It was highlighted that should this lower limit prove to be unworkable, then the Committee could revisit it and make further recommendations for change.

Following some discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Clayden and seconded by Councillor Roberts that the £100k limit be reduced to £50k.

As there was no debate on this amendment, it was put straight to the vote and declared CARRIED.

The Chairman then invited debate on the substantive recommendations. Following some discussion, it was agreed to revisit the procurement limit at the next meeting of the Committee to assess how this was working in reality and to decide if there was the need to increase the limit back up to a higher figure.

The Committee then

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The general Terms of Reference for Committees in Part 3, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution be noted and that the specific Terms of Reference for the Corporate Support Committee, as established by Full Council on 19 May 2021, as set out in Part 1 and Part 2 of Appendix 1 also be noted;
- (2) Suggestions for change in respect of the Terms of Reference be made through the Constitution Working Party for Full Council;
- (3) The schedule of Committee meetings as set out in the Calendar of meetings, provided as a background paper, be noted; and

(4) The 'matters reserved' scheme whereby matters not reserved by Committee are delegated to Officers by default as set out in Appendix 2 are agreed, subject to the amendment made at the meeting in relation to Procurement in that the contract value for Procurement be revised from £100k to £50k.

75. OFFICER DECISION IN RELATION TO THE RENEWAL OF A THREE-YEAR MICROSOFT LICENCE SUBSCRIPTION USING THE KENT COMMERCIAL SERVICES FRAMEWORK

The Chief Executive presented his report which explained the reasons behind him needing to take a decision under the Officer Scheme of Delegation to renew the Council's Microsoft Licence Subscription for three years using the Kent Commercial Services Framework. It was explained that the decision had been made in full consultation with the five Political Group Leaders and the Chair of this Committee.

A range of questions were asked by the Committee. It was interested to receive a breakdown in terms of costs and how much money was spent on window licences and how much was being spent on office products. The Head of Technology and Digital explained that the breakdown covered a mixture of things, the Council had Windows licences which covered PCs, there were Office products covering Word and Excel and there were database server licences which absorbed about a third of that cost. In addition to that there were corporate Microsoft licences that provided a whole range of other products such as mobile device management through Microsoft products so a third of this were for servers; database operating systems with the rest being down to computers or end point devices not just for products such as word. This made it very difficult to compare like with like.

Other queries related to the need to consider using alternative products, market testing and obtaining better value for money. Questions were asked as to how this might affect cost and disruption to services. A request was made to undertake market testing earlier when the licences would be up for renewal in three years' time. The Head of Technology and Digital explained Microsoft's pricing structure and that through the contract frameworks discounts were passed onto local government. Testing to assess what other frameworks were offering was and had been undertaken.

Having had the recommendation proposed by Councillor Dendle and seconded by Councillor Roberts,

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the decision taken by the Chief Executive to renew the Microsoft Licences for three years be ratified.

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76. JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE PANEL

The Chief Executive presented this report outlining some background in terms of how new arrangements had been established since 2015/16 to undertake informal consultation with staff; Human Resources and UNISON for the purpose of consultation to discuss both policy and operational issues.

This report, in view of the new Committee structure in operation, sought approval to continue with conducting informal and formal Unison Staff Consultation Panel meetings. It was confirmed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee would be members of the formal Unison Staff Consultation Panel and that instead of reports or policies being referred to Full Council for approval, they be reported direct to this Committee for consideration.

Having had the recommendations proposed by Councillor Dendle and seconded by Councillor Roberts,

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The continuation of the informal and formal Unison Staff Consultation Panel meetings be supported in the existing format; and
- (2) The proposal that this Committee give approval of formal policies and reports being submitted to them from the formal Unison Staff Consultation Panel meetings also be supported.

77. OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE - 23 MARCH 2021 - EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

The Chair introduced this item explaining that at Minute 509 [Equality and Diversity] there were three recommendations for this Committee to consider. The Group Head of Policy explained that the Overview Select Committee had requested a review to be undertaken of equality and diversity across the Council. That Committee had received a detailed report outlining what the Council had in place to create and sustain equality and diversity.

Having had her report fully debated by the Overview Select Committee it had agreed three recommendations which were:

- (1) that a consultant is appointed carry out an in-depth Equality and Diversity Survey and advise on a best practice action plan for the Council;
- (2) that the Group Head of Policy be given delegated powers to appoint this resource within the available budget; and

- (3) that the Council takes full account of Equalities and Diversity in the development of the new Corporate Plan 2022- 2027.

These three recommendations had been due to be reported to Cabinet on 17 May 2021 for consideration. As this meeting had been cancelled, under the new Committee structure, it was this Committee that was now responsible for this area of work. It was explained that the Council did not have an Officer that held this level of expertise to compile and conduct such an in-depth quality audit. A budget was in place to undertake this work, subject to this Committee approving delegated powers to the Group Head of Policy to appoint this resource.

In discussing the recommendations, concern was expressed over the potential cost for this work. The report had confirmed that a budget of £10,000 was available for this purpose. The Committee felt that £10k was excessive for such a project and that it should be reduced to £5k. If this then proved to be an impossible figure to work with, a further report could be brought back to the Committee and the budget revisited. This amendment was then formally proposed by Councillor Clayden and seconded by Councillor Madeley.

The Chief Executive provided reassurance in that the £10k budget in place for this project did not mean that the full budget would need to be spent. The matter had already been fully debated by the Overview Select Committee with that Committee agreeing to the three recommendations outlined. To reduce the budget to £5k could potentially cause a serious delay in procuring a consultant to move this important work forward, if this could not be achieved within a £5k budget, with the matter then having to be resubmitted to the Committee for further debate.

Questions were asked over the timing in place to conduct this review. As the Council was still recovering from the pandemic, was it the right time for it to take place now, or should the Council wait until it knew more about the shape of its workforce first.

Other Councillors expressed concern at the amendment put forward. This was because the need to produce a best practice action plan addressing equality and diversity was a matter of great importance and had been a project identified to progress for a long time. A budget of £10k had been approved, this did not mean that £10k had to be spent. There were concerns that Councillors were wanting to micro-manage the issues of the Council instead of allowing its professional Officers to proceed with important projects.

The Group Head of Policy responded to the points raised confirming that the £10k budget was to also cover any remedial action such as training for staff and Councillors that the survey might identify as an action for the Council to undertake.

The Committee Manager was asked to confirm the full wording of Councillor Clayden's amendment. This was to change the wording in recommendation (1) – additions have been shown in **bold** and deletions shown using ~~strikethrough~~.

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~~That~~ a consultant is appointed to carry out an in-depth Equality and Diversity Survey, **at a cost of no more than £5k**, and advise on a best practice action plan for the Council **and if the results of that work cost more than £5k then this matter be brought back to the Committee for further consideration**".

Councillors Clayden and Madeley confirmed their agreement to this wording.

Having undertaken a named vote on the amendment the result was split (4) voting for and (4) voting against. The Chairman then used his casting vote and the amendment was declared CARRIED.

The Chairman then returned to the substantive recommendations, as amended, and the Committee

RESOLVED - That

(1) a consultant is appointed to carry out an in-depth Equality and Diversity Survey, at a cost of no more than £5k, and advise on a best practice action plan for the Council and if the results of that work cost more than £5k then this matter be brought back to the Committee for further consideration;

(2) the Group Head of Policy be given delegated powers to appoint this resource within the available budget; and

(3) the Council takes full account of Equalities and Diversity in the development of the new Corporate Plan 2022- 2027.

## 78. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive introduced the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2021-22 confirming that this was work in progress.

The Chair outlined that the work programme provided the Committee with an opportunity to drive innovation and change within the Council and so it needed to think carefully about suggesting appropriate items. How the public contacted the Council was important whether this was using IT, the telephone or face to face communication. It was issues such as this that the Committee needed to think carefully about.

As a way forward, the Chair asked Councillors to have a think about future items and to email suggestions to him so that he could discuss these with Officers and at the Committee's next agenda prep meeting which was confirmed for 9 July 2021. He therefore asked for suggestions to be emailed to him by the end of June 2021.

A request was made to not forget the Equality and Diversity Policy debated earlier.

Subject to approval at the next Corporate Support Committee meeting

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Having received no further suggestions, the Chair thanked Members for their input.

(The meeting concluded at 7.19 pm)